

Report from DNR regarding three (3) citizen petitions and request to include future citizen petitions in the Division of Fish and Wildlife's next biennial rule revision process; Administrative Cause Nos. 15-142D, 15-143D

Citizen Petition Reports

Petitions

The following three petitions have received by the Natural Resources Commission Division of Hearings within the past few months:

1. Extend the ring-necked pheasant hunting season to either December 31 or the first week in January. (Administrative Cause No. 15-142D)
2. Allow multiple turkeys to be taken during the spring wild turkey season with a random selection of hunters determined through a drawing. (Administrative Cause No. 15-143D)
3. Allow the fall wild turkey firearm season to be open statewide. (Administrative Cause No. 15-143D)

The Indiana DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife will be starting the next biennial rule revision process in April of this year by soliciting comments from the public on potential rule changes. This process allows anyone to request a rule change to the Division of Fish and Wildlife. Staff of the Division of Fish and Wildlife and Law Enforcement will review these ideas, as well as proposals from DNR staff, for potential rule changes from May 15-July 15 of this year. The plan is to present rule changes to the NRC for preliminary adoption in September of this year after approval from the Department and the Office of Management and Budget.

Therefore, at this time, the Division of Fish and Wildlife is requesting that any other citizen petitions that are received between now and May 15, 2016 be included in this next rule revision process. A detailed response for each of these petitions will be presented to the NRC in July.

Extend the ring-necked pheasant hunting season to either December 31 or the first week in January

The Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) has been monitoring trends in pheasant numbers through a spring crowing count since 1976. Spring crowing counts of male ring-necked pheasants are good indicators of overall pheasant numbers. Based on results from spring crowing counts, Indiana's pheasant population remains at a near- record low level. In addition, available pheasant habitat is limited. As of the fall of 2015, less than 110,000 acres of farmland are idle through the Conservation Reserve Program across the state's pheasant range. Without an increase in grassland habitat and subsequent increase in pheasant numbers, extending the season will likely have a negative impact on ring-necked pheasant populations. Although various factors, such as habitat loss, predation, and weather, contribute to these observations, increasing the season length during periods of low numbers or at time when weather can stress birds is not advisable.

Allow multiple turkeys to be taken during the spring wild turkey season with a random selection of hunters determined through a drawing.

Indiana's wild turkey population, like those of many other states in the eastern United States, has declined to a lower level as the population matured following the restoration era. Lower annual brood production, harvests, and lower hunter success have characterized this population shift to

the “new normal” (*see the three figures on page 3*). Many counties of the state would not be able to sustain a multiple bird bag over time without significant declines in hunter success and satisfaction, especially with lower annual brood production and as our statewide turkey populations continue to level off.

A multiple-bird bag limit in the spring would require a relatively complicated and restrictive “hunter draw” system that would likely lead to hunter dissatisfaction and negatively impact hunter recruitment and retention. Biologically, Indiana has experienced below normal or lower brood production since 2005 but has maintained a relatively sustainable annual spring harvest around 12,000 birds and annual average hunter success rate of 20-22%. An increased spring gobbler harvest under our license structure would, in time, likely reduce the proportion of adult gobblers available for harvest in some areas, especially on public hunting lands.

Therefore, the end result of a multiple bird bag limit in the spring season in Indiana would likely be a proportional reduction of adult gobblers available for harvest and an overall negative impact on the turkey population.

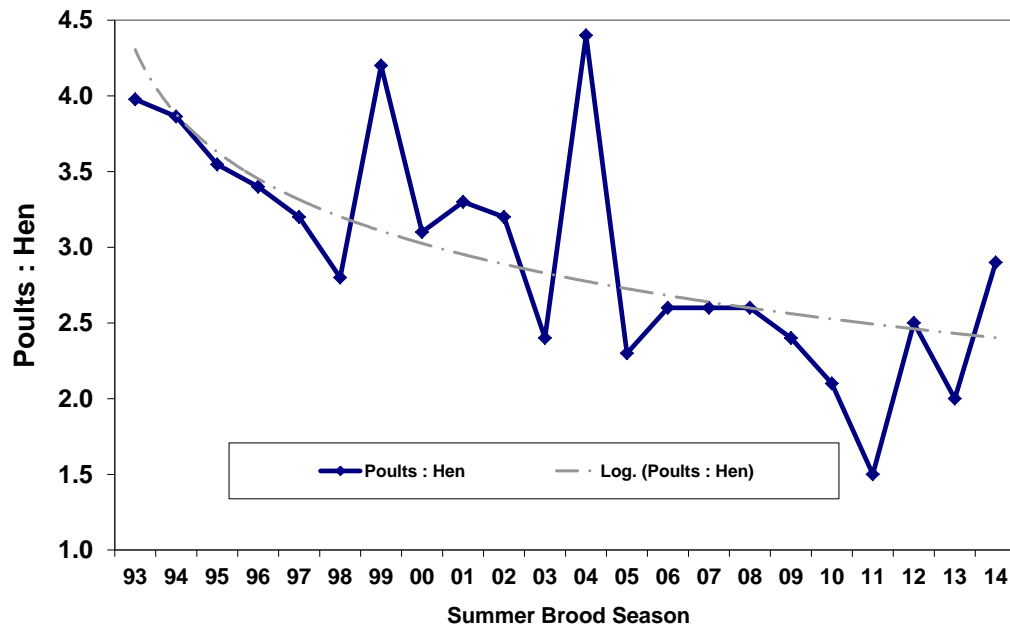
Allow the fall wild turkey firearm season to be open statewide

The fall firearms portion of the fall turkey season (12 days) generally accounts for 60% of our fall harvest. The other 40% of the fall turkey harvest occurs during the 55-60 day archery only season days already available statewide. Since fall turkey hunting is either sex, it has the potential to create an overharvest situation, especially with the much higher success of firearms hunting and the low summer brood production. Low production generally results in a higher proportion of adults in the fall harvest rather than the fall harvest being proportionally more juveniles. Indiana has experienced 10 consecutive summers of below normal or low brood production since 2005 (*see the figures below*).

The Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) believes that it is not the time to significantly liberalize our fall firearm hunting opportunities in those areas of the state where comparatively low turkey populations would not be able to sustain the increased fall harvest level without a reduction in the spring hunting success and harvests. Indiana turkey hunters have historically indicated they want the emphasis of our turkey program to be directed toward sustained spring hunting opportunities (19 days) over fall hunting opportunities for wild turkey.

Therefore, the DFW will continue to monitor turkey population and harvest trends to assess whether modifications to the current fall season structure are possible without negatively impacting the resource and sustaining the current level of spring hunting opportunities. Based on these continual assessments, the DFW does plan to request the addition of Elkhart, Kosciusko, and Noble counties in northern Indiana to the firearms portion of the fall season starting in 2017.

Wild Turkey Production - Indiana



Roadside Gobbling Indices

